

# ECHOES OF THE SNOW QUEEN

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*What is good appears bad,  
In Imp's mirror, now broken,  
Its glass shards pierce the eye of young Kay.  
Spinning light into dark,  
Ice glazing his heart.  
'Ere the Snow Queen steals him away.*

*Concerned for her playmate,  
Gerda, faithful and stalwart,  
Her undying commitment decrees  
That she leave all to follow,  
Throughout the long seasons  
'Til at last, Kay is found and set free.*

~One~

*"Perhaps the river will carry me to little Kay," thought Gerda. Then she became more cheerful, and stood up, and for many hours she watched the pretty green banks.<sup>1</sup>*

I am Gerda. The faithful helper. The one who never gives up. Just as she—seemingly without thought—leaves all behind to find Kay, her friend with the frozen heart, the lost lad who cannot save himself, so too, have I always done. I remember myself in her story, walking in her footsteps, seeking somehow to find those who also left me behind without a word. Wounded by life, with hearts rolled stony and cold, they meander tracks I never wish to tread, and yet I do.

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<sup>1</sup>Andersen, Hans C. *Michael Hague's Favourite Hans Christian Andersen Fairy Tales*. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1981. Print. All italicized text.

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~Two~

*“You mean you’ve seen him?” cried the little girl, and nearly smothered the crow with kisses. “Gently, gently!” said the crow. I think I know: I believe it may be little Kay, but now he has forgotten you for the Princess.”*

When I was young, my mother was recurrently lost for hours on end, generally after loud shouting matches with my father—she doing most of the shouting. No fond farewells—just a clatter of keys, the slam of a door, and I left behind. Convinced she might never be found. She always returned, accompanied by gifts gained during her desertion. Nothing much—a bauble or book—but it embodied the regret she could not speak.

I amassed quite a library that way.

I celebrated the sanctuary of those books—cozily comforted by stories that never changed, that took me in, and created a confidence that life could be good. Like Gerda, I sought assurance that what I searched for might be found. Fairy tales have happy endings, and so, I came to believe, could I.

But, believing does not always make it so.

~Three~

*Every flower stood in the sun, thinking only of her own story or fairy tale. Little Gerda heard many of them, but not one knew anything of Kay.*

Acutely alert to the emotions of others, I think I always knew my mother was unhappy, but I doggedly determined not to notice, selecting instead the blisses of make-believe. In later years, when she had settled, we spoke of temperaments like mismatched socks, and stony silences that declined to dance. But when I was young, I had read none of this. I did wonder—like a child who misconstrues the blazing story of stars—if I was at the core of their quarrels. I never felt I was her gravitational tug toward home.

Inexplicably, during my early teens, my parents declared détente, and eventually relocated to a state of satisfaction with each other. They had been married over fifty-five years when my mother took her last breath, and left us—once more—without a goodbye.

Happy endings are not easily written.

## ~Four~

*"I can give her no greater power than she already has. Don't you see how great that is? Don't you see how man and beast are obliged to serve her, and how with her bare feet she has got on so well in the world?"*

I always felt a certain affinity for Gerda; she steeped in the spirit to meet any obstacle in order to rescue Kay. Striding confidently forward, in spite of the sightlessness of her course, uncanny encounters with a strong-minded sorceress set on constraining her, or the glittering blade of the robber girl picturing her a pet; Gerda stood unwavering in her course.

A feminine embodiment of the Hero's Journey, Gerda set out on her quest willingly. Although some encounters might require physical strength, she battled hers with compassion and conciliation, and in the end, won Kay's healing through her love. Aided time and again by those she met along her way, she defied her dragons of Loneliness and Fear, overpowering them by her faith.

I, too, grew dependent on faith, and the belief that there was Someone who watched out for me. Someone who remembered me, and would never leave me alone. Someone who, like Aslan of Narnia, would breathe courage into me, and prepare me to face my own dragons, to meet my trials and tests.

## ~Five~

*Little Gerda wept hot tears...they penetrated into his heart; they thawed the lump of ice and melted the little piece of glass in it.*

Her sacrificial tears thawed the icy shell around Kay's heart, and empowered Gerda's triumph. Childhood dreams shattered when Kay disappeared, Gerda's quest to reclaim him gifted her with the courage to bring back the broken pieces. Recovering what she had lost, courage carried her home again.

I have also wept hot tears over a loved one's frozen heart, but still await the thawing of that icy shell. Victory has thus far eluded me. Waiting on the other side now, I see that for mothers with lost children, the journey can be arduous, the route seemingly ceaseless. Yet, just as did Gerda, I endure. Guarding the gate of his last exit, I lie in wait—eternally expectant—for his arrival, and the answering tears that will wash the mangling glass shards forever from his eyes.

~Six~

*On they went to the Grandmother's door, and up the stairs, and into the room where everything stood in the same place as before... but as they went through the door they noticed they had become grown-up people.*

It was through the journey that Gerda was transformed. Just a short time had passed, yet, as with all heroes, the sorrows of Gerda's journey brought maturity. Dilemmas left behind, and a new perspective birthed in her a wisdom only pain could bring.

Like Gerda, I too, have been transformed, yet I carry no visible marks. It is my heart that bears the brunt of the bruising. Woe-filled appeals, proclamations of restoration, and fragmented possibilities—perpetual poison without antidote. Long years of anxiety-laced love eventually takes a toll on its host.

Life's sorrows always leave a mark. Woven of the same resilient fibers, scars blend with the broken, and signify a life rearranged and repaired; only death stays their formation. A scar is a badge of honor. That puckered, polished skin is your keepsake from the conflict—a landmark on the landscape of your soul. Reminders of both wound and healing, scars are your proof of life.

~Seven~

*He laid out whole patterns, so that they formed words—but he could never manage the word he wanted—the word 'eternity.'*

In my early years, as I hid my heart in a book, stories spun into my world, like brilliant stars illuminating and enlightening my confusion, helping me to find my way home. I recognized their heroes, and reveled in the magic. Stories offered me hope from the shelter of the page, like a mirror offering the images I most longed to see. That hope became my anchor.

As I grew older, Life presented me, once again, with another who left me behind without a word, and I found myself, like Gerda, setting forth on a journey to fetch him home. But, I discovered, the quest undertaken doesn't always lead to freedom. Sometimes there is no happy ending.

Then again, I can still hear hope whispering to me

“...not yet.”